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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 TEL AVIV 000124

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MASS](#) [TU](#) [KWBG](#) [IS](#)
SUBJECT: BARAK AND GAL VISITS TO ANKARA STABILIZE
ISRAELI-TURKISH RELATIONS

REF: ANKARA 58

Classified By: DCM Luis G. Moreno, Reason 1.4 (b) (d)

¶1. (S) Summary. Israel took advantage of two previously scheduled visits to Ankara by Defense Minister Barak and MFA Director General Gal this week to demonstrate Israel's strong interest in preserving good relations with Turkey. According to Israeli accounts, last week's crisis over a theatrical dressing-down of the Turkish ambassador in front of Israeli television cameras. The GOI remains concerned by PM Erdogan's penchant to bash Israel in public, and more broadly by the AK Party's drift toward emphasizing ties with Syria and Iran as well as its contacts with Hamas, the defense cooperation remains important to both countries and Barak made a point of not ruling out an eventual resumption of Turkish mediation with Syria. End Summary.

¶2. (S) Minister of Defense Barak's chief of staff, Yoni Koren, told the Ambassador January 19 that Barak's January 17-18 visit to Ankara had been a success. Barak spent several hours with Foreign Minister Davutoglu. While they disagreed on many things, the Israelis considered Davutoglu an intelligent and thoughtful interlocutor and they had a serious, wide-ranging discussion. The main topics were Gaza/Hamas, Syria and Iran. Davutoglu expressed concern about the situation in Gaza and argued he could be helpful with Hamas. Asked how Turkey could help, Barak suggested that Davutoglu convey to Hamas leader Khalid Mash'al that if he truly wanted to improve life for ordinary Gazans, Hamas should release captive soldier Gilad Shalit. Barak suggested that Israel might be willing to loosen up on the Gaza border crossings after that is done, but not before. On Syria, Davutoglu complained about lost opportunities, and stressed Turkey's desire to continue its mediating role with Israel and Syria. Barak told him that Netanyahu was focused on the Palestinians, not Syria. Koren observed that the Turks appeared to have little contact with the PA, and are focused on Hamas. Barak told the FM that Israel will at some point become interested again in negotiating with Syria, and is open to ideas if the Turks have them, but Netanyahu is not prepared to move at this point. Barak also complained about Erdogan's on-going public rhetorical attacks on Israel, and warned that his rhetoric is turning the Israeli public against Turkey. If Erdogan continues to do it, he will limit whatever possibilities exist for Turkey to work with Israel on regional issues, as well as undermine the overall bilateral relationship.

¶3. (S) Barak's discussions with Minister of Defense Gonul were constructive, with the MOD clearly more positive about the relationship with Israel and desirous of maintaining and restoring cooperation on military and security issues. (Note: the Israeli media is reporting that issues over UAV sales to Turkey have been resolved. Israel's largest circulation newspaper, Yediot Aharonot, January 21 quoted an

unnamed senior Turkish military officer as saying that relations with Israel were too important to be left to the politicians.) With both Davutoglu and Gonul, Koren said, there was a very good atmosphere, despite what Koren termed Davutoglu's &ideological approach to the region. Barak told both that the &incident8 (reftel) with Turkish Ambassador Celikkol, who was in both meetings, was in the past. Barak felt he made good contact with Davutoglu and that perhaps could be a useful channel in the future. On Iran, Koren said the Turks had been ambivalent, claiming they are in close contact with the Americans and do not want to see Iran become the regional superpower. They did not show any particular inclination to do anything to pressure Iran, however, noting that they share a border with Iran and &have to live with it.8

¶4. (C) MFA Director General Yossi Gal separately visited Ankara January 19. Gal's aide Dana Kursh, who accompanied Gal, told PolCouns she thought Gal's visit also had been a success. Turkish MFA Under Secretary Sinirlioglu, a former ambassador to Israel, maintained warm personal ties with many Israeli officials, including Gal. Sinirlioglu confirmed to Gal that the incident between Ambassador Celikkol and Israeli Deputy Foreign Minister Ayalon was now behind them and Turkey continues to see many important mutual interests with Israel.

There were several parts to Gal's visit: the morning was devoted to a DG-level strategic dialogue with Sinirlioglu followed by a working lunch hosted by the Turkish MFA. In the afternoon Gal met with the AKP head of the Parliament,s Foreign Affairs Committee Murat Mercan and the Minister for European Union Affairs Egeman Bagis. Kursh said Mercan was much more pessimistic about relations with Israel. Bagis,

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however, is supposed to be close to Erdogan and received Gal graciously. The last part of the visit was a dinner at the Israeli Ambassador,s residence, to which the Israelis invited a cross-section of Turkish journalists and academics, many of whom were quite supportive of maintaining close Turkish ties to Israel, Kursh said.

¶5. (C) Kursh noted that the Turks were very focused on resuming assistance projects for the Palestinians, including at the Jalameh industrial zone in the northern West Bank, which have been put on hold by Israel. They also pressed for permission to resume Turkish assistance convoys into Gaza and discussed Gaza humanitarian issues, with Gal emphasizing Israel's cooperation with UN on allowing more material, including window glass, into Gaza for reconstruction purposes. Kursh said that Sinirlioglu is supposed to pay a return visit in May, and discussion of a possible visit by President Gul is back on the agenda.

¶6. (C) Comment: The sense we got from our MOD and MFA interlocutors is that both Israel and Turkey decided to move beyond last week's crisis and put relations back on track. We doubt that the tensions below the surface have disappeared, however, and more harsh comments on either side could easily cause the impulse to defend national honor to overcome the recognition of common interests.

CUNNINGHAM